

**US presidents have always come to  
us for an overview of world affairs.**



**guardian.co.uk**

## Al-Qaida 'planted information to encourage US invasion'

---

**Richard Norton-Taylor**

The Guardian, Friday November 17 2006

---

**A** [larger](#) | [smaller](#)

---

A senior al-Qaida operative deliberately planted information to encourage the US to invade Iraq, a double agent who infiltrated the network and spied for western intelligence agencies claimed last night.

The claim was made by Omar Nasiri, a pseudonym for a Moroccan who says he spent seven years working for European security and intelligence agencies, including MI5. He said Ibn Sheikh al-Libi, who ran training camps in Afghanistan, told his US interrogators that al-Qaida had been training Iraqis.

Libi was captured in November 2001 and taken to Egypt where he was allegedly tortured. Asked on BBC2's Newsnight whether Libi or other jihadists would have told the truth if they were tortured, Nasiri replies: "Never".

Asked whether he thought Libi had deliberately planted information to get the US to fight Iraq, Nasiri said: "Exactly".

Nasiri said Libi "needed the conflict in Iraq because months before I heard him telling us when a question was asked in the mosque after the prayer in the evening, where is the best country to fight the jihad?" Libi said Iraq was chosen because it was the "weakest" Muslim country.

It is known that under interrogation, Libi misled Washington. His claims were seized on by George Bush, vice-president, Dick Cheney, and Colin Powell, secretary of state, in his address to the security council in February, 2003, which argued the case for a pre-emptive war against Iraq.

Though he did not name Libi, Mr Powell said "a senior terrorist operative" who "was responsible for one of al-Qaida's training camps in Afghanistan" had told US agencies that Saddam Hussein had offered to train al-Qaida in the use of "chemical or biological weapons".

What is new, if Nasiri is to be believed, is that the leading al-Qaida operative wanted to overthrow Saddam and use Iraq as a jihadist base. Nasiri also says that part of al-Qaida training was to withstand interrogation and provide false information.

Nasiri said last night he was later sent to London by his French handlers to infiltrate Finsbury Park mosque and spy on its imam, Abu Hamza, as well as another radical cleric, Abu Qatada.

He said MI5 and French intelligence were watching the two clerics in London from as far back as 1997. He said he told them that Abu Hamza was carrying out combat training and how he listened into conversations relaying messages between Abu Qatada and the training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"At the time we didn't think that the growing threat from al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden was sufficient to put more resources on it," Bob Milton, a Metropolitan police special branch officer, told Newsnight. "We were monitoring what he was doing,

certainly working with the US and European colleagues to do that. But at that time we were still unsure what the threat would be," he said.

Abu Hamza was charged in 2003 and convicted this year for incitement to murder and race hate crimes.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2008